



**Directorate of  
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## Afghanistan Situation Report

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## AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT

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## PERSPECTIVE

## THE SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN: FIVE YEARS LATER

Five years into the war in Afghanistan, neither the USSR nor the resistance has gained a decisive edge in the fighting, and both sides appear determined to continue the struggle. The insurgents, stronger now than at any time since the invasion, are fiercely determined to oust the foreign invader from their homeland and command the support of almost the entire Afghan population. But the stakes are high for the Soviets, and they almost certainly believe they will ultimately subdue the resistance.

The Developing Insurgency

Since the invasion, the fighting has gradually spread to all areas of the country. Guerrilla attacks against military supply convoys, outposts, and installations during 1978 and 1979 in central Afghanistan and in the provinces along the Pakistan border had threatened the Communist government and probably prompted the Soviet invasion. The Soviets easily gained the upper hand in the cities, but the insurgency spread to the northern and western provinces. We estimate that now the insurgents hold complete sway in at least two-thirds of the country and are active to some degree in the rest.

The insurgents, who in the beginning were little more than ragtag bands fighting with antiquated weapons under traditional leaders, have gradually become more sophisticated and effective. New leaders like Panjsher commander Masood in Kapisa Province, Zabiullah Khan in Balkh Province, and Abdul Haq in Kabul Province are improving guerrilla tactics and organization and beginning to fashion new political structures in their home areas.

In our judgment, the number of insurgents is growing. [ ] we estimate the number of full- and part-time insurgents to be at least 150,000, up from an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 in January 1980. Despite selected Soviet reprisals against villages suspected of harboring resistance fighters, support for the insurgents among Afghans remains high. Most travelers from Afghanistan report that insurgent morale is also high despite five years of war. These travelers say that many more Afghans want weapons.

The intensity of the war—as in all guerrilla struggles—varies in different areas and at different times of the year. Some commanders—such as Masood or those close to supplies in Pakistan—maintain fairly constant pressure on government outposts and cleverly attack convoys. Others, because of a lack of nerve, ammunition, or weapons, only occasionally challenge the Communists. Some Afghans simply wait for their enemies to make the first move.

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On the whole, insurgent capabilities have improved markedly, especially in the past two years.

- The number of attacks on cities has increased significantly. Rocket barrages on Kabul are more frequent, and security in Herat and Qandahar remains tenuous. The resistance has also been able to disrupt the Afghan economy with attacks on power and supply/distribution systems.
- Resistance capability to counter Soviet and Afghan airpower has improved. We estimate that the Soviet and Afghan Air Forces have lost over 500 aircraft in combat since the invasion with losses increasing little by little in the last two years. This year the insurgents for the first time brought down a Soviet IL-76 transport.
- Many insurgents appear to be making better use of heavy weapons, mines, and nontraditional tactics. [REDACTED]

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#### Insurgent Limitations

The resistance remains far from a coherent national movement. It is still in large measure a spontaneous rebellion of a large number of ethnic groups, villages, and tribes. Traditional rivalries among tribes, clans, and religious factions, together with personal hatreds, still cause bloody fighting and in many areas prevent much military coordination. [REDACTED]

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The resistance also is hampered by weak political leadership. The absence of an organization able to speak for the resistance as a whole limits its efforts to influence international opinion, to have a direct voice in negotiations on an Afghan settlement, to ensure continued diplomatic and material support, and to coordinate military efforts. [REDACTED]

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Although the insurgents are better supplied than in the past, many groups still lack sufficient arms and ammunition, especially to deal with Soviet airpower. Many insurgents are virtually untrained and have little knowledge of explosives or modern weapons. The ability to adapt to Soviet strategies and vulnerabilities derives much more from combat experience of individual groups than any knowledge of guerrilla doctrine. [REDACTED]

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#### The Soviet Military Effort

The Soviets have successfully achieved their goal of sustaining the Babrak regime, but they have been unable to inflict more than temporary setbacks on the resistance or to substantially reduce insurgent pressures. The Soviets' unimpressive showing against the insurgents has resulted in part from an apparent effort to minimize costs and casualties. The number of Soviet troops has grown slowly since the invasion from 85,000 to 110,000. We estimate casualties have reached 25,000 and direct military costs are running

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at some \$3 billion a year. The Soviets and Afghans have lost some 660 aircraft in combat and in accidents. [REDACTED]

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An unimaginative and often rigid counterinsurgency strategy has contributed to the Soviets' lack of success in thwarting the insurgents. The Soviets generally have relied on stereotyped search and destroy operations, that often allow the insurgents to escape before initial assaults. [REDACTED]

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The Afghan military, inept to begin with, has shown no significant improvement. Desertions and casualties aggravate manpower problems caused by insufficient conscription. We estimate that 30,000 men desert each year from the 50,000-man force. Shortages of equipment, low equipment readiness rates, and the inability of many soldiers to use available equipment exacerbate the Afghan Army's problems. [REDACTED]

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Nor is Moscow having success in resolving the split in the Afghan ruling party. [REDACTED] factionalism—rooted in social and ethnic differences—has resulted in assassinations, armed clashes, collaboration with insurgents, and diversion of government leaders from the tasks of formulating and implementing government policy. [REDACTED]

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### Soviet Frustrations

[REDACTED] frustration over the lack of progress in Afghanistan is high among middle level Soviet officials. Actions the Soviet leadership took in 1984 to improve the effectiveness of the Soviet military in Afghanistan and step up pressure on Pakistan indicate that the leadership shares these concerns to some extent. [REDACTED]

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Good evidence suggests that the war has unfavorably affected attitudes and behavior of Soviet citizens. It has led more citizens to dodge military service, introduced Soviet youths to new forms of drug abuse, fed long-standing ethnic tensions, increased working-class resentment of intelligentsia privileges, provided new opportunities for corruption, and intensified popular cynicism about regime propaganda. [REDACTED]

Soviet actions in Afghanistan have reinforced international perceptions of Soviet aggressiveness; prompted additional Western, Chinese, and Japanese defense efforts; made Third World nations suspicious of Soviet intentions; and hampered Soviet efforts to exploit the Nonaligned Movement. [REDACTED]

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### How the Soviets View the Situation

Moscow has been slow in coming to grips with the real nature of the problem. This is partly because of overly optimistic progress reports from Kabul and partly from a reluctance to admit that the majority of the Afghans do not want a Marxist revolution. Officials in charge of implementing Soviet policy in Afghanistan still allege slow progress is being made and that within another year or two the resistance will be essentially under control. [redacted]

Despite the frustrations and difficulties in fighting a resilient and elusive foe in Afghanistan, there is no indication that the Soviets see their situation as desperate or that Soviet resolve is flagging. [redacted] the leadership at the outset did not anticipate that pacifying Afghanistan would be a long-term proposition. [redacted]

The US Embassy and Western journalists based in the USSR report that the majority of the elite and the man in the street in Moscow appear to accept the leadership's security rationale for Soviet involvement and view the war as a necessary evil. [redacted]

The Soviets clearly find the international political costs acceptable. The international community imposed unprecedented economic and political sanctions on the USSR because of the invasion, but after five years, nearly all of the countries that cooled relations with Moscow have resumed normal political and economic contacts. [redacted]

The Soviets [redacted] almost certainly believe—that any move to withdraw without securing the Marxist regime would substantially weaken their international posture and encourage the West to step up its pressure on Soviet interests around the globe. Victory in Afghanistan, on the other hand, would add substantially to the USSR's image as an effective super-power that had succeeded in a power grab against a neighboring state. And the Soviets would have enhanced military capability to intimidate other regional states. [redacted]

### Outlook

We think Soviet confidence about getting the resistance under control is unwarranted and that the USSR will need to maintain sizable forces in Afghanistan for years to come. In the near term, the Soviets will probably continue their economy of force strategy, doing no more than necessary to keep abreast of improvements in insurgent capabilities and stepping up pressure on Pakistan through further cross-border attacks. Moscow probably anticipates that improved insurgent effectiveness will impact only slowly and unevenly on Soviet forces and that even with better arms and training, the insurgents will be unable to inflict a major defeat on Soviet forces. [redacted]

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Further augmentations in Soviet forces are likely. We believe there will be no more than 5,000 to 10,000 additional troops in the coming year. Reinforcements of 20,000 to 40,000 troops are possible, however, if Moscow moves decisively to neutralize recent gains by the resistance. Modest increases in air and ground force capability are also likely. Tactical adjustments, such as more aggressive use of Soviet troops and greater reliance on small-unit actions, are likely, but they will be constrained by Moscow's desire to hold casualties to a minimum and by Soviet officers' lack of flexibility and initiative. [REDACTED]

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In our judgment, the insurgents will improve their effectiveness through better training and weaponry. Despite social, political, and ethnic differences, the insurgents are likely to improve interregional military cooperation gradually. Political unity, however, is likely to remain elusive. They will remain unable to engage the Soviets head-on in positional warfare. [REDACTED]

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Prospects for a political settlement on Afghanistan will remain dim as long as both sides are confident that time is on their side. We believe Moscow will continue to use the UN talks on Afghanistan to counter international criticism and probe for concessions by Islamabad. [REDACTED]

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